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SUBJECT: French Regional Paper Slams American Presence Post as "Economic Intelligence" Post

1.(U) On April 12, the Toulouse-based, left-of-center regional daily "La Depeche du Midi" published an article on alleged U.S. economic intelligence gathering in Europe, with a short sidebar article entitled "The True Role of the American Presence Post." The front page headline, "When America Plunders Europe," featuring a picture of President Bush standing on the CIA seal, announced the story which ran on page 3. The sidebar alleges that the "discreet" APP, with its "maximum security measures" dedicates itself to "economic intelligence and lobbying" for American businesses. It goes on to say that APPs in France should not be confused with the "consulates" in Marseille and Strasbourg. Noting the "antenna" in Toulouse was opened in 1999, the article goes on to name the other APPs, noting that the "infiltration" of the APPs is such that one, Bordeaux, is co-located with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

2.(U) The feature article is entitled "America's Other War." It asserts that besides being on a war-footing over Iraq and Bin Ladin, the United States is leading a "secret war" across five continents to "maintain the political and economic leadership of America in the world." It notes that, since President Clinton's administration, the United States has "made economic security its number one objective in its foreign policy." Another sidebar article interviews Bernard Carayon, a French UMP deputy who is a member of the National Assembly's Finance Commission and mayor of the southwestern town of Lavaur. In 2003, he headed a Ministry of Interior committee and authored a report on economic intelligence issues. He is currently working on a parliamentary report on "tools of industrial policy." In the "Depeche" interview, he states that all of the subcontractors of Airbus (which is based in Toulouse) are the targets of Americans who wish to "catch up on its technology lag by any means."

3.(U) With a circulation of just over 200,000, "La Depeche du Midi" is the only daily published and sold in Toulouse. It is sold in ten departments of southwest France as well. It has been directed by the Baylet family for the past fifty years. Senator Jean-Michel Baylet, who is president of the Radical Party of the Left (PRG), is its president. The senior editor, Jean-Christophe Giesbert, is a dual French and American citizen. He is a son of an American GI who landed on Normandy on D-Day and the co-author of a book on D-Day entitled "The Heros of June 6."

4.(U) The Ambassador has written a letter to Mr. Giesbert to express disappointment with the article on the APP, stressing the transparent mission of the APPs to better communicate with France's people, provide American citizen services and commercial advocacy in key French cities. He points out that the ten French consular offices in the United States have similar missions. The English text of his letter follows below.

5.(U) "Dear Mr. Giesbert,

I was disappointed to read your newspaper's April 11th article regarding "The Real Role of an American Presence Post." Past meetings with Depeche du Midi editorial staff and previous articles in your paper had led me to believe you clearly understood the mission of these "little Consulates." That mission does not include economic intelligence as alleged in your newspaper's article.

As we have explained, these posts focus on service to U.S. citizens, public diplomacy, and assistance to U.S. companies interested in working in the region and those wishing to do business with the United States. American Presence Posts issue passports to U.S. citizens, register births abroad, and work with organizations promoting mutual understanding through cultural and educational exchanges. On the commercial side, they speak to U.S. companies wishing to partner with local French businesses, providing them with contact information for relevant executives and public information about the business and legal climate.

American companies in the region have developed strong cooperation with numerous French businesses, providing significant investment and jobs in both of our countries.

Every business day, the United States and France transact approximately \$1 billion in business with each other, and the affiliates of American and French companies employ many of each other's citizens. French investment in the United States generates 515,000 jobs for Americans, while U.S. investment in France provides 583,000 jobs.

Business promotion is a normal priority for all diplomatic offices around the world U.S. and French. France maintains consulates in nine U.S. cities, in addition to its Embassy in Washington, and all ten offices promote French trade and investment interests across the United States.

The transparent nature of our five American Presence Posts in France is a testament to the dynamism of Franco-American relations. In the early 1990s, we were forced to close Consulates throughout the world, including those in Lyon and Bordeaux, as new Embassies opened in the former Soviet Republics. Realizing the importance of France, we developed the idea of creating one-officer posts in important French centers with minimal staff and administrative burdens. Because the term Consulate carries certain bureaucratic requirements, the American Presence Post concept was born, and the first U.S. post in Toulouse was opened.

We encourage you to come visit the APP, meet its staff, and better learn about "the real role of an American Presence Post."

6.(SBU) The PAO has spoken directly with the editor, who assured her that he saw no problem with printing the Ambassador's letter. Mission officers will meet with Mr. Giesbert to discuss further the allegations of American commercial espionage and the alarming characterization of the APPs.  
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